



1

Law 3: Conceal Your Intentions

[Robert Greene](#)

Album [The 48 Laws of Power](#)

Law 3: Conceal Your Intentions Lyrics

JUDGEMENT

Keep people off-balance and in the dark by never revealing the purpose behind your actions. If they have no clue what you are up to, they cannot prepare a defense. Guide them far enough down the wrong path, envelop them in enough smoke, and by the time they realize your intentions, it will be too late.

Part 1: Use Decoyed Objects of Desire and Red Herrings to Throw People Off The Scent

If at any point in the deception you practice people have the slightest suspicion as to your intentions, all is lost. Do not give them the chance to sense what you are up to: throw them off the scent by dragging red herrings across the path. Use false sincerity, send ambiguous signals, set up misleading objects of desire. Unable to distinguish the genuine from the false, they cannot pick out your real goal.

TRANSGRESSION OF THE LAW

Over several weeks, Ninon de Lenclos, the most infamous courtesan of seventeenth-century France, listened patiently as the Marguis de Sevigne explained his struggles in pursuing a beautiful but difficult young countess. Ninon was sixty-two at the time, and more than experienced in matters of love; the marquis was a lad of twenty-two, handsome dashing, but hopelessly inexperienced in romance. At first Ninon was amused to hear the marquis talk about his mistakes, but finally she had had enough. Unable to bear ineptitude in any realm, least of all in

seducing a woman, she decided to take the young man under her wing. First, he had to understand that this was war, and that the beautiful countess was a citadel to which he had to lay siege as carefully as any general. Every step had to be planned and executed with the utmost attention to detail and nuance.

Instructing the marquis to start over, Ninon told him to approach the countess with a bit of distance, an air of nonchalance. The next time the two were alone together, she said he would confide in the countess as would a friend but not a potential lover. This was to throw her off the scent. The countess was no longer to take his interest in her for granted--perhaps he was only interested in friendship.

Ninon planned ahead. Once the countess was confused, it would be time to make her jealous. At the next encounter, at a major fete in Paris, the marquis would show up with a beautiful young woman at his side. This beautiful young woman had equally beautiful friends, so that wherever the countess would now see the marquis, he would be surrounded by the most stunning young women in Paris. Not only would the countess be seething with jealousy, she would come to see the marquis as someone who was desired by others. It was hard for Ninon to make the marquis understand, but she patiently explained that a woman who is interested in a man wants to see that other women are interested in him, too. Not only does that give him instant value, it makes it all the more satisfying to snatch him from their clutches.

Once the countess was jealous but intrigued, it would be time to beguile her. On Ninon's instructions, the marquis would fail to show up at affairs where the countess expected to see him. Then, suddenly, he would appear at salons he had never frequented before, but that the countess attended often. She would be unable to predict his moves. All of this would push her into the state of emotional confusion that is a prerequisite for successful seduction.

These moves were executed, and took several weeks. Ninon monitored the marquis's progress: through her network of spies, she heard how the countess would laugh a little harder at his witticisms, listen more closely to his stories. She heard that the countess was suddenly asking questions about him. Her friends told her that at social affairs the countess would often look up at the marquis, following his steps. Ninon felt certain that the young woman was falling under his spell. It was a matter of weeks now, maybe a month or two, but if all went smoothly, the citadel would fall.

A few days later the marquis was at the countess's home. They were alone. Suddenly he was a different man: this time acting on his own impulse, rather than following Ninon's instructions, he took the countess's hands and told her he was in love with her. The young woman seemed confused, a reaction he did not expect. She became polite, then excused herself. For the rest of the evening she avoided his eyes, was not there to say good-night to him. The next few times he visited he was told she was not at home. When she finally admitted him again, the two felt awkward and uncomfortable with each other. The spell was broken.

INTERPRETATION

Ninon de Lenclos knew everything about the art of love. The greatest writers, thinkers, and politicians of the time had been her lovers--men like Le Rochefoucauld, Moliere, and Richelieu. Seduction was a game to her, to be practiced with skill. As she got older, and her reputation grew, the most important families in France would send their sons to her to be instructed in matters of love.

Ninon knew that men and women are very different, but when it comes to seduction they feel the same: deep down inside, they often sense when they are being seduced, but they give in because they enjoy the feelings of being led along. It is a pleasure to let go, and to allow the other person to detour you into a strange country. Everything in seduction, however, depends on suggestion. You cannot announce your intentions or reveal them directly in words. Instead you must throw your targets off the scent. To surrender to your guidance they must be appropriately confused. You have to scramble your signals--appear interested in another man or woman (the decoy), then hint at being interested in the target, then feign indifference, on and on. Such patterns not only confuse, they excite.

Imagine the story from the countess's perspective: after a few of the marquis's moves, she sensed the marquis was playing some sort of game, but the game delighted her. She did not know where he was leading her, but so much the better. His moves intrigued her, each of them keeping her waiting for the next one--she even enjoyed her jealousy and confusion, for sometimes any emotion is better than the boredom of security. Perhaps the marquis had ulterior motives; most men do. But she was willing to wait and see, and probably if she had been made to wait long enough, what he was up to would not have mattered.

The moment the marquis uttered that fatal word "love", however, all was changed. This was no longer a game with moves, it was an artless show of passion. His intention was revealed: he was seducing her. This put everything he had done in a new light. All that before had been charming now seemed ugly and conniving; the countess felt embarrassed and used. A door closed that would never open again.

"Do not be held a cheat, even though it is impossible to live today without being one. Let your greatest cunning lie in covering up what looks like cunning."- Baltasar Gracian, 1601-1658